

Lacan's Anamorphic Object: Beneath Freud's *Unheimlich*

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Much of the current research on the constitution of subjectivity has been grounded on attempts to conceptualize the body without collapsing into reductive materialism or, to the contrary, theorizing a completely historical subject in the hope of doing ontological and ethical justice to formative specificity. With the rationalism-empiricism struggle put to bed by Kant's transcendental turn and tucked in tightly by Hegel's dialectic, the twentieth century was greeted with a maelstrom of world wars and efficient technology which produced the greatest number of corpses in the shortest time in world history; and still, to use Hegel's famous saying, thought stood "at the crossroads of materialism and idealism." Wrestling with articulating the interpenetrating quagmire of consciousness and body marked the beginning of twentieth century thought. For instance, Freud's science of childhood development aligned emerging aspects of subjectivity with the very development of the body itself. In another effort, Husserl identified eidetic constructs which structured experience and, most importantly for our purposes, he distinguished between the phenomenal lived-body of the *Lebenswelt* known as *Leib*, and the anonymous thing-like quality of the body known as *Körper*. In this context, the corpse is the very opposite of the body insofar as the body is the site of the unfolding of subjectivity whereas the corpse seems to be the limit of subjectivity: a spatial-temporal marker of a subject which was. For instance, although it has been suggested that the corpse has somehow been emptied of subjectivity, is it not just as likely that it is we who are emptied before it? What is it about the corpse that disgusts us, intrigues us, fascinates us and reveals us to ourselves? The notion of the 'uncanny' is frequently invoked as a placeholder for the specific and irreducible character of such threshold experiences (such as encountering a corpse). But what is the structure of the uncanny? Moreover, what are the broader considerations regarding limit experiences as integral to the constituting of the subject?

With the rationalism-empiricism struggle put to bed by Kant's transcendental turn and tucked in tightly by Hegel's dialectic, the twentieth century was greeted with a maelstrom of world wars and efficient technology which produced the greatest number of corpses in the shortest time in world history; and still, to use Hegel's famous saying, thought stood "at the crossroads of materialism and idealism." Wrestling with articulating the interpenetrating quagmire of consciousness and body marked the beginning of twentieth century thought. Much of the current research on the constitution of subjectivity has been grounded on attempts to conceptualize the body without collapsing into reductive materialism or, to the contrary, theorizing a completely historical subject in the hope of doing ontological and ethical justice to formative specificity. For instance, Freud's science of

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['homely,' 'homey']. The negative prefix *un-* is the indicator of repression." ("The Uncanny" 244).¹ More to the point, the appearance of the uncanny is an 'indicator' that repression has been 'in place' and is what has enabled our everyday, *familiar* life, to cohere. What Freud understands is that the significance of the uncanny is not merely some concept of strangeness held in opposition to a notion of the familiar or home-like. Rather, the uncanny is the strangeness that reflects the moment in which the complex circuitry of both planes and their relation (familiar and strange, conscious and unconscious, self and other) are discernable. What is difficult is that even as the slippage of the unconscious into the conscious is momentarily evidenced in the uncanny, the radical alterity of the unconscious renders representation frustrated. This frustration obscures attempts at articulating the concept of the uncanny and, I suggest, that even Freud's own efforts at clarifying the uncanny lead us away from this sought clarity. I argue that Freud's analysis of the uncanny, often reduced to ocular analogues and metaphors of vision is limited by an overarching ocularcentrism that permeates his account of the uncanny.² In attempting to more fully elucidate the uncanny, I argue that although not explicitly connected to the uncanny, Jacques Lacan's work on the 'gaze' and his elaboration of 'anamorphosis' can be utilized in offering conceptual resources which better capture the tensile structuration manifest in the experience of the uncanny.

For Lacan, the 'schism' between the eye and the gaze presents a dissimilitude which briefly enables us to rip off our spectacles, pull out our eyes, and, with our glance *askew*, peer beyond vision. Lacan's 'anamorphosis,' which reveals the unsettled and unsettling, circuitous movement of the gaze, undermines the permanence of the traditional Western notion of a stable subjectivity and interrupts the familiar and comfortable Euclidean spatiality of the subject. It is the calm subject of representation that continually evades death and castration (becoming corpse and corpses) which is undermined and deeply problematized here. Consider an experience of the uncanny in which space seems to tighten up, distort, shorten or throb. One cannot simply adjust or realign expectations to accommodate this new version of reality—as soon as one begins to accept such an encroachment, it slips away—only to be replaced by a memory which is more constituted by what it lacks than by that which (in)forms it. It is not an experience that can be mapped out along the x-y axis in abstract co-ordinates; nor is its temporality linear. The uncanny dislocates the spatio-temporal continuity of everyday experience disturbing the intentional structure of habitual apprehension.

In his *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1973), Jacques Lacan offers a point of praise to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's distinction in *The Visible and the Invisible* for going beyond the intentional structure of the seer-seen and recognizing that to see, for visibility itself to be possible, there must be a seeing *to which* I am subject, "I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides" (*Fundamental Concepts* 72). Consider also Merleau-Ponty's "Eye and Mind", "In a forest, I have felt many times over that it was not I who look at the forest. Some days I felt that the trees were looking at me..." ("Eye and Mind" 129) or his citation in "Cezanne's Doubt", "[t]he landscape thinks itself in me" ("Cezanne's Doubt" 67). Lacan refers to this primal seeing as the pre-existence of the gaze. He suggests the gaze "is specified as "unapprehensible," though his seminar XI attempts to capture its crepuscular contours.

Lacan opens his chapter on 'Anamorphosis' with a discussion of the Cartesian consciousness which is captured in Valery's phrase: "*I see myself seeing myself*" (*Fundamental Concepts* 80). The Cartesian mode of representation seeks to ground its own certainty in the apprehension of its own thought hence offering a privileging of the subject without need for its other. In the Cartesian mode of apprehending the world, since all thought is thought that has come from me and all representations, or re-presentations to myself, all thought, is "reminiscent of property" (81) Lacan calls it "this *belong to me* aspect of representations" (*Ibid.*). For Lacan this mode of apprehending the world is "active annihilation"; if everything is limited to my own apprehension—I have annihilated the world; this is death. Hence, Lacan does not begin his discussion of the gaze upon the möbius of the "*I see myself seeing myself*" but rather prefaces his investigation into the gaze with the mode of *warmth*: "reference to the body as body" (80). Lacan contrasts the "*I see myself seeing myself*" with the statement "*I warm myself by warming myself*" (80). For Lacan, the second statement is reflective of an embodied subjectivity. He states, "*I warm myself by warming myself* is a reference to the body *as body*—I feel that sensation of warmth which is diffused and locates me as body. "Whereas in the '*I see myself seeing myself*,' there is no such sensation of being absorbed by vision" (*Ibid.*, emphasis mine).

Lacan grounds his analysis of the gaze in a distinction between geometrical space (which Lacan will call 'geometral' space—the Cartesian correlative space Lacan criticized above) and those perspectives which offer the distortion, stretching and the working of desire in what he will relate to the *scopic drive*. The scopic drive makes geometral space possible but is not

reducible to it. The essence of the scopic drive is captured in the *split* between the eye and the gaze, the manifest and the possibility, or condition of all that can be seen, is identified as a drive realized at the level of the scopic field. The scopic is *not the visible* but rather the drive which makes visibility and being-seen possible. Lacan's understanding of the scopic drive is informed by Freud's earlier insights regarding the instinct to see surfacing as scopophilia (to be further explicated below). For Freud, what is important about the *aims* of the drive of seeing directed toward scopophilia (love of seeing) or exhibitionism (love of being seen), is that they are not concerned with the object they are directed towards but rather with the organization of the subject's drives herself. That is to say, what I desire to see is not *something*. This primordial desire to see can never be satiated. Lacan develops this discussion in terms of his central notion of desire: what I desire is not to see *some-thing*, the directionality of the aim initiated in seeing is not only propelled by desire *but is also its aim*. Since Lacan considers desire as lack, a receding absence is always at play. This is evident even in the most basic tension between seeing/being seen. The relation of the split foundational to the scopic is not only imbued with absence but also with ambiguity, since, according to Lacan, "ambiguity...affects anything that is inscribed in the register of the scopic drive" (83).

In elaborating his notion of the gaze, Lacan considers the most widespread understanding of the concept, the idea of the gaze developed in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. Although he clearly departs from Sartre he nonetheless emphasizes that, as in his own understanding of the gaze, Sartre also understands that the *gaze is not reducible to the visual* but rather the ground from which the visual can arise. Lacan notes that the importance of the example which Sartre uses to describe the gaze is not an image of vision but is a sound such as the rustling of leaves to a hunter which shifts his sense of space and pulls him spontaneously to a different conscious awareness (84). This example evokes an embodied shift in the sense of space and the concomitant meaning which, as a result of that shift arises, in the hunter's experience. We can imagine the sudden shifting running over and through the hunter rendering the body and mind erased into one alert focused conscious locus. It is this exemplar which best approaches Lacan's notion of the gaze and it emphasizes for us that the Lacanian gaze is not reducible to a visual metaphor.³ Again, for Lacan the gaze resists its depiction and thus he renders "...the gaze... specified as unapprehensible" (83). The unapprehensibility of the gaze is what makes it a structure at the

precipice of tension between the unconscious and the conscious and hence Lacan's gaze is ideally situated to help us buttress Freud's understanding of the emergence of the uncanny as a denotation of the appearance of return of the repressed.

The depth of Freud's tacit reliance on his assumptions regarding vision cannot be overemphasized.⁴ Freud's ocularcentrism begins early in his thought. Indeed, Freud's understanding of knowledge and the appearance of civilization are related to his assumptions regarding the relation of instinct to vision. For instance, according to Freud, once humans became bipedal, genitalia became 'visible' and shame became necessary to control the constant sexual reminder which the visibility of genitalia produced.⁵ Freud's idea of the activity of seeing as an instinct is fully developed by 1910 in his "Psychogenic Disturbance of Vision."⁶ A more developed version of the thought emerged in his 1915 essay "Instincts and their Vicissitudes." In this work, Freud outlines the tripartite structure of the instinct 'to see' (*Schautribe*) which arises developmentally in the child: First, the act of looking *at* an external object; second, the scopophilic instinct of rescinding the object and looking at a part of one's own body; and finally, looking at an 'other' (or, the body part of an other). Freud's thought includes a consideration of the nature of activity and passivity with regards to the instincts as they are expressed in the subject as *aim*. Hence, the act of looking-at is active and being looked-at a "transformation to passivity and setting up of a new aim" (129). It is questionable that the second moment in the development of the instinct is strictly passive and it is important to clarify the 'that of being looked-at' here is looking at a part of one's *own* body—which is not to be confused with being looked at by another. Freud does however indicate that the aim of the instinct is never separate from the prior aim and that it would be best to understand these aims as successive and 'co-existing' waves (130-131). The difficulty which Freud grapples with in parsing out the passive-active aspects of vision is precisely why Lacan turns to Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty's notion of the chiasm reveals (both experientially and theoretically) the irreducibility of the seeing and being seen (perhaps better illustrated by one embracing their hands together in the touching-touched relation Merleau-Ponty also uses to describe this gap). This irreducibility is located for Lacan in the gaze—that which makes vision possible, that which allows for both passivity and activity—without being reduced to either.

Freud's essay of 1919 "The Uncanny", which is a commentary and extension of Ernst Jentsch's earlier 1906 work, "On the Psychology of

the Uncanny”, provides a fascinating analysis of the uncanny which is thoroughly saturated with optical, visual and specular allusions. Jentsch and Freud both situate their interrogation of the uncanny, or in the German, *Unheimlich*, etymologically. The sensation of the uncanny manifests as a ‘not-at-homeness,’ or as a lack of ease. Jentsch explains this in terms of a concealed disorientation grounded in the confusion of the “known/self-evident” not realized in consciousness. This experience arises when “subjective perception of vacillation is abnormally strong” (7). He explains the disorientation as indicative of an earlier primal moment (what he calls the ignorance of primitive man or the mental inadequacies of some men) in which our unmastered relation to the natural world, our lack of advanced knowledge, caused fear. This fear is not merely fear of the unknown, it is a primal response to being able to survive by knowing, for example, the difference between the groves in a tree stump and a snake. This fear also reveals itself in individual development insofar as Jentsche claims children or ‘childish souls’ are much more fearful than their adult counterparts. Jentsche’s most notable claim about the *unheimlich* is his claim that:

Among all the psychical uncertainties that can become an original cause of the uncanny feeling, there is one in particular that is able to develop a fairly regular, powerful and very general effect, namely, doubt as to whether an apparently living being is inanimate, and conversely, doubt as to whether a lifeless object may not in fact be animate—and *more precisely, when this doubt only makes itself felt obscurely in one’s consciousness...*the mood lasts until these doubts are resolved (8).

Considering Jentsch’s philological claim that the notion of the uncanny is rooted in fear, it is not surprising that we find the English roots of the word as follows: “mischievous, malicious, unreliable...Of person: Not quite safe to trust...as being associated with supernatural arts or powers” (*OED*). The reference to supernatural arts and powers explain the claims of uncanniness associated with early mechanized automatons. In her provocative work on automatons, Gaby Wood suggests, “Clearly there was an anxiety...that all androids, from the earliest moving doll to the most sophisticated robots, conjure up. Mixed in with the magic and the marvel is a fear: that we can be replicated all too easily, and that we are uncertain now of what it is that makes us human” (*Edison’s Eve* xiv). Jentsch refers to the experience of encountering wax figures and other thinkers, including Freud, have

mentioned mannequins, automatons, and robots. Indeed, the idea of the “Frankenstein complex,” or fear of robots, is often explained in reference to the workings of the uncanny (xiv). Jentsch’s insight into the oscillation or ‘vacillation’ between animate and inanimate reveals a slippage explained as “intellectual uncertainty” (Sellars, Introduction to “On the Psychology of the Uncanny” 220). While Freud initially rejects this slippage, claiming that, “the undecidable cannot be tolerated as a theoretical explanation,” he ultimately makes a similar argument toward the end of his paper: “...an uncanny effect is often and easily produced when *the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced*” (“The Uncanny” 244).

Freud suggests that while it is true that “the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar”, Jentsch reduces “the uncanny to the novel and unfamiliar” (“The Uncanny” 221). Reviewing various definitions of the *Unheimlich* and *Heimlich*, Freud suggests he will go beyond the simplistic reduction of the uncanny with the unfamiliar. Indeed, his detailed etymology is revealing insofar as he shows that while often we see the *Heimlich* as home, native, familiar/familial, there are indications that it has almost seemed to mean the opposite as in “to behave *Heimlich* as if *there was something to conceal*” (223, emphasis mine) and further “[f]rom the idea of ‘homelike, ‘belonging to the house, the further idea is developed of something withdrawn from the eyes of strangers, something concealed, secret...” (225). Freud concludes the first section of his essay with, “Thus *Heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite” (226). The co-incidence with its opposite is not in an oppositional structure as such, but rather in a structure of *ambiguity* and *oscillation*. The vacillation between the familiar and unfamiliar is vital to our understanding of the uncanny. Both the familiar and unfamiliar must be both present (and hence absent) in some way in order for the experience of the uncanny to arise.

In the content of his essay on the uncanny, Freud very idiosyncratically retells the E.T.A. Hoffman story of “The Sandman.” Opening with an account of the protagonist’s childhood, we meet Nathaniel who was occasionally sent early to bed, his nurse warning him the “the Sand-Man was coming...a wicked man who comes when children won’t go to bed and throws handfuls of sands in their eyes so that they jump out of their heads all bleeding. Then he takes the eyes in a bag and feeds them to his children” (“The Uncanny” 227-228). Freud tells us that the “dread” of the Sandman became fixed in Nathaniel’s heart (228) yet he was compelled to *see* the Sandman. So,

staying up late one night when the Sandman was expected, Nathaniel sees that he is actually (complete with his heavy tread) the repugnant Lawyer Coppelius. In some machinations over a brazier stove, his father and the Lawyer work and the child hears Coppelius call out “eyes here, eyes here!” He screams, exposing his presence and Coppelius, taking hold of him, is about to drop red hot coal into his eyes, but his “father begs him off and saves [his son’s] eyes.” A year later the father is killed by an explosion and Coppelius disappears and Nathaniel has a bout of madness (Freud notes that apparent facts and childhood imagination could be blurred). When Nathaniel grows up he believes that the Sandman has come back into the life as Coppola who is an optician (notably the root of the name Coppola is *coppo* which translates to eye sockets). Coppola approaches Nathaniel proffering his wares with the chant, “weather-glasses also got fine eyes, fine eyes!” and Nathaniel’s terror emerges only to be immediately allayed in realizing that he is offering him spectacle. Nathaniel, however, purchases a ‘spy-glass’ from Coppola. With his spy-glass, Nathaniel ‘spies’ on the daughter of a master mechanic maker of automatons. He falls in love with Olympia who is “strangely silent and motionless.” Olympia’s passivity, as the one being ‘looked-at,’ mirrors Freud’s second moment in the development of the instinct to see (recall above). Her passivity is explained since she is actually a clock-work automaton made by her ‘father,’ Spalanzani, who commissions the optician Coppola (the double of the Sandman) to make her wooden eyes. The two masters quarrel, Freud tells us, and Coppola takes the eyeless Olympia as Spalanzani throws her wooden eyes at Nathaniel. As Nathaniel descends into mental breakdown, Olympia’s eyes bleed and he is reminded of his father yelling at him to spin around from the fire the night Coppelius saw Nathaniel spying on him. Nathaniel screams, “Spin about, wooden doll!” and he tries to strangle Olympia’s “father.” Once again our protagonist recovers and reinvests in his original love Clara (who, along with her brother is central to the Hoffman account and virtually absent in Freud’s retelling). The couple decide to climb a central tower for a better “view” of the city and using his spy-glass (the original ‘eyes’ he used to view Olympia) he sees the original figure of Coppelius the Lawyer and another return of the Sandman (and hence his madness) ensues. This may be because his original trauma was brought on by seeing the Sandman see him seeing him. He picks up his betrothed, screams “Spin about wooden doll”, and tries to throw Clara into the street below. Nathaniel catching the eye of the Sandman- lawyer shrieks, “Yes! Fine eyes, fine eyes” and flings himself

to his death “on the paving-stones with a shattered skull” as the Sandman disappears into the crowd (230).

The multiple layers of the ocular fascination are quite apparent throughout Freud’s essay. It seems that it is not the dead body as such that is necessarily uncanny—but the blurring of its status as between death and life.⁷ In the end, Freud concludes by emphasizing that the uncanny in the fiction he has used in much of his analysis is *not* the same thing as an “actual” experience of the uncanny (just as we tolerate certain elements of the uncanny in horror pictures and the theatre that would be terrifying in actuality). Freud suggests that there are fundamentally two classes of the uncanny both kinds have the return of the repressed at their core. He dismisses the discussion of literature outright for a topic beyond his current purview but will later turn although he has spent the majority of his time analyzing Hofmann’s fictional account of “The Sandman.”

In Cixous’ criticism of Freud’s notion of the uncanny, she invokes Lacanian language: “The effect of uncanniness reverberates (rather than emerges) for the word is a relational signifier. *Unheimliche* is in fact a composite that infiltrates the interstices of the narrative and points to gaps we need to explain” (536). The Lacanian concepts, which help us deepen the structure of the uncanny (which, remember, always includes its *heimliche*), sound like support for the visual, consider: ‘scopic drive’ and ‘gaze.’ Appropriating these terms in order to deepen or undo them is exactly what Lacan has in mind. We must think past the easy-access, visually saturated Western culture, which is dominated by a vision that subtends our cultural immaturity as we remain stuck in an ego-centered, mirror-stage dominated world.

The multiple relations to the Oedipal drama should also be noted (including the loss of eyes in realization of inappropriate love) in our explication of Freud’s ocularcentrism. Freud suggests that Nathaniel’s fear of losing his eyes, as is the case in general regarding the fear of going blind, acts as a “substitute for the *dread* of castration” stating, “the *uncanny effect* of the Sandman [refers] to the *anxiety* belonging to the castration complex of childhood” (“The Uncanny” 231; emphasis mine). Here Freud connects anxiety, dread and the uncanny. Many years later Freud maintains this connection: “Anxiety is undeniably related to expectation; one feels anxiety *lest* something occur. It is endowed with a certain character of indefiniteness and objectlessness; correct usage even changes its name when it has found an object, and in that case speaks instead of *dread*” (*Autobiographical Study* 112).

This analysis is similar to Martin Heidegger's discussion of *Unheimlichkeit* in his work *Being and Time* written ten years earlier than Freud's comment on anxiety but a few years after his article on the *Unheimlich*. For both Freud and Heidegger, the uncanny is to be distinguished from fear insofar as fear has an intentional structure through which the subject knows that which it is afraid of or for. Anxiety has a 'character' or 'objectlessness.' Heidegger's description of *Angst* (anxiety) claims that while fear takes an object, anxiety is without an object as such. Though not completely synchronous, I suggest that it is clear that Freud's articulation of anxiety is trying to grasp that which Heidegger ultimately describes as anxiety in which the uncanny arises. Heidegger writes, "In anxiety one feels '*uncanny*' ...On the other hand, as Dasein falls, anxiety brings it back from its absorption in the 'world.' Everyday familiarity collapses." (233).

When Freud suggests that the uncanny effect of the Sandman belongs to the anxiety originated in childhood repression, he structures the uncanny within a complex temporality of the recursive. In Freud's more general psychoanalytic theory, the anxiety of the fear of castration initiates the act of repression out of the fear of being castrated, for instance, in the Oedipal complex, the repression of desire to possess the mother and kill the father. Every successful repression comes with some form of compensation. In the case of the Oedipal Complex, giving up complete, unmediated access to the mother means entering into the Symbolic order, i.e., gaining language. In Harari's words, "Let us remember that the subject of representation evades castration" (*Lacan's Four Fundamental Concepts* 121). The castration complex allows movement into sociality and the setting up of the superego (through the internalization of norms), which enables the solidifying of the ego and the concomitant resources which fortify the egoic identity. This stabilizes the unstable remnants of the difficulty of the initiation into the symbolic, which is only possible through primal loss—the loss of the mother as complete guarantor of one's needs. In other words, the impact of exteriority, which carves out the primordial elements of subjectivity, is concealed *but never completely gone*. Any psychoanalytic account of the uncanny cannot be devoid of reference to the storehouse of these remnants—the unconscious. The repressed, as Freud tells us, always *returns*. This 'return of the repressed' is the recursive structure, which enables the anxiety related to the Sandman to return. The constituting of our subjectivity involves undergoing processes at the borders of the psyche and soma, which seek their fate, their repetition even, in the symbolic and imaginary registers. Freud writes, "[The uncanny

is] marked by the fact that the subject identifies himself with someone else, so that he is in doubt as to which his self is...there is a doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self. And finally, there is the constant resurgence of the same thing” (“The Uncanny” 234) and furthermore he suggests that the uncanny may be the double which “harkens back to particular...time when the ego had not yet marked itself off sharply from the external world and other people” (236). This slippage and ambiguity is foundational for the psychoanalytic conception of the subject. In Kristeva’s discussion of the *Unheimlich* the inherent temporal complexity of subjectivity and experience are illuminated; we are both the child and the adult, the self and the other: “Consequently, therefore, that which *is* strangely uncanny would be that which *was*...familiar...” (*Strangers* 183). We are othered only through similarity. The foreigner is strange only in that he must *first* be something familiar to us, and paradoxically, that similarity which is familiar to us, is that very strangeness that is within ourselves. The strangeness of the foreigner is essentially the *familiar strangeness*, which we repress in ourselves: “Uncanny, foreignness is within us: we are our own foreigners, we are divided...My discontent in living with the other—my strangeness, his strangeness—rests on the perturbed logic” (181).

Lacan’s most profound contribution to the developmental aspects of psychoanalytic theory, the mirror stage, also reflects this ‘perturbed logic’ though in a distinct way. Briefly, the basis of ego-formation is an internalized projection of a distortion or misrecognition (*méconnaissance*); seeing itself in the mirror (between 6-18 months) as a stable image clashes with the radical motor immaturity and lack of control the infant generally feels. This feeling of wholeness and completeness gives rise to a deep pleasure (*jouissance*) and initiates a process in which the child internalizes the mythical, masterful version of herself as the foundation of her ego. This accounts for Lacan’s serious break with traditional psychoanalysis since it means that the ego should not be fortified but destroyed. This also means that the foundation of our subjectivity is a fundamental alienation fortified by a desire for mastery. The imaginary ego resists the alterity it is nonetheless constituted by because this constitutive alterity is a lack that undermines the illusory wholeness, mastery and unity and therefore the assumption of stability upon which the narcissistic ego believes it is founded. We deny the alien so we can maintain the illusion of a substantive ego. However, this constitutive distortion also means that there is a core lack. This is what initiates desire (for the other). However, desire “splits and disperses the subject...desire never hits its target:

it becomes entangled in the other's lack and veers off beyond them" (*The Ideology* 276).

In one of his seminar diagrams, Lacan draws two intersecting circles. One circle is Subject, the other Object and where they *intersect*: a. *Object a* is the mode of lack, the gaze as "object or cause of desire" (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 147). In the *schism* between the eye and the gaze, "The world is all-seeing, but it is not exhibitionistic—it does not provoke our gaze. When it begins to provoke it, the feel of *strangeness* begins too. What does this mean, if not that, in the so-called waking state, there is an elision of the gaze and an elision of the fact that not only does it look, *it also shows*" (74-75). The "strangeness" for Lacan is a showing, an appearing in the open, which nonetheless points to its own elision. This helps us articulate a more fundamental structure of the uncanny. The visual intersections, which attempt to indicate lack, call to mind the ambiguity and resistance to representation which is always at play in the scopic drive. In his illuminating article "The Phenomenology of the Gaze in Merleau-Ponty and Lacan", Rudolph Bernet emphasizes the circuitry of the structure of the gaze. The characterization of the circuitous nature of the gaze is helpful in connecting it to the anamorphic and the temporality of the *return* emphasized in the psychoanalytic conception of the deep anxiety associated with the uncanny. In attempting to "phenomenalize" the invisibility of the gaze, Bernet writes,

It is only at the moment in which the gaze, set in motion by the drive to see (that is, to see the gaze of the other) returns to its bodily source, thus to the eye as an erogenous zone that the scopic drive gives birth to a subject Lacan calls "the acephalic subject...of the drive." (S XI 181) Under the pretext of a Merleau-Pontian conception of a pre-subjective narcissism of vision to which the invisible flesh of the world holds secret. And there is nothing to prevent us from going a step further and *understanding the circuit of the scopic drive as the path of the appearance of the invisible gaze...* (116, emphasis mine).

If the "circuit of the scopic drive is our path to revealing the invisible gaze", then the anamorphic is our map. Anamorphosis already contains the logic of the circuit, which is a looping logic of return. This is obviated in its Greek roots wherein anamorphosis (anamorfwoiz) is equated with transformation, or "to transform back *again*" (*OED*, emphasis mine). In the visual arts anamorphosis is an optical technique, a *trompe l'oeil*, employed in canvass

and film, which relies on geometric stretching or distortion. The famous example which Lacan discusses in his seminar XI is from Hans Holbein's "The Ambassador's" (1533) in which two ambassadors (erect imagos of mastery) stand next to each other with sullen faces surrounded by objects of wealth, worldliness and culture. Many of the objects suggest eye-like images such as multiple globes, round-bottomed lutes, round medals. Within the picture is a large elongated skull, which is only visible if the viewer *shifts* her position. The skull is only seen if *movement* of the perceiver's vision is possible. Anamorphosis is the place where, to use Harari's language, two "planes" of vision (of sight, of representation, etc.) co-exist in a constrained oscillation in a circuit between the planes and also with relation to the viewer. This circuit is also necessarily caught up in a temporality reflective of this movement. The anamorphic image only works if there is a temporal shifting from one plane back to the other and "back again." Thus, although we have referred to the task of unveiling the 'structure' of the gaze, we mean this only in the sense of pointing to the primordial aspects revealed in the anamorphic—and, that 'structure' is a *recurrent* movement: "It is thus more correct to say that the gaze is, or rather *moves*, between us. The gaze is thus really an invisible phenomenon *en route*, its manifestation is in movements, as it travels a path...the gaze does not always appear in the same manner at each point" ("Gaze in Merleau-Ponty and Lacan," 120).

It is no surprise that one perspective of the picture offers up the skull, the death's head, which acts on multiple levels contemporaneously. For instance, the death's head suggests 'here is a representation of the non-representational.' The anamorphose appears in representation as a way to undo that sphere of the representational. Moreover, the instability of the non-representational can only be represented by a 'representation' of death itself, which simultaneously retreats, eliding out of perspective. In this same way, even while it is elided, the gaze in its elision—'*it shows*.' Thus the Holbein painting is a provocation of presumed continuity within the visual, which then enables the structure of the gaze to become indicated. Lacan tells us that only when this provocation begins does "*the feeling of strangeness begin too*" (74, emphasis mine). The tension between the represented and the non-or-un-represented mimics the dialectic of desire, which emerges out of the intersection that resists itself.

According to Lacan, the construction of the picture which employs the geometrical laws of perspective utilizing straight lines which establish a path of light that creates an image—an image which "allows that which

concerns vision to escape totally” (86). Harari suggests that it is no surprise that Lacan has used an optical resource which frustrates the “naïve realism” of the classic subject of representation (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 120). So too, the uncanny disrupts our everyday assumptions about the nature of both space and time. This is also explicit in another favorite example of Lacan’s – Salvador Dali’s dripping watches. Dali’s watches ‘tell us time(s)’ in ways that are odds with each other. Thus we understand the familiar temporality of the watch ticking off seconds and marking our time in consistent, discrete units; but there is always ‘another’ time (and the time of the other) and another plane. In the second plane, Dali depicts a ‘strange’ time, which reveals just as much about the space as it does about time. In Dali’s watches, the spatiality loses its Euclidian edges and melts into a spatio-temporal matrix that seems to fold back on and into itself. Anamorphosis undermines representation itself because it fractures the similitude upon which the subject of representation is sustained. Anamorphosis breaks open this similitude—throwing the subject of representation against the reality of death/castration from which it is always attempting to cover over, and to re-cover. For Lacan, this constant movement is generated by the continual propulsion of our desire’s lack, the primal absence at the heart of subjectivity and of signification, the fall-out of which is history.

The well-formed figures of Holbein’s *The Ambassadors* stand on their respective spheres, ghostly globes of global space—like empty, dead eyeballs themselves—the world which lacks its flesh. Echoes of an ‘ownership’ of culture and peoples ring as the Ambassadors covet the objects which represent culture. These are ‘ambassadors’ are the conduits of colonialism and riches gained via mastery of the world and Others. The space of the canvass indicates a more sinister space which is constructed, instrumentalized, and divided in the imagination of alienated egos and drawn out in the reality of the blood of others which marks the infancy of European modernity. But just as Heidegger links the anxiety of the uncanny with the falling away of the trappings of the everyday, perhaps the death’s head undoes the arrogance of the ambassadors depicted above; are they also in some way ambassadors not only to the death of Others but to ultimate alterity, their own deaths? The emergence of this other plane against which no objects or cultural achievements, can secure us. Against the treasures of time, and the advances of history and human reason, Holbein has ‘figured’ what can emerge at *any* time and challenge, if not ruin, a protective edifice, such as an individual or cultural ego.

The doubling of the men, the globes and even the two separate circles upon which each man stands can conceptually recall the uncanny for us. These are the two separate ‘worlds’/planes in this described circuit (conscious/un-conscious *and back again*, familiar-unfamiliar *and back again*) both connected and disrupted by the return of the repressed alluded to by the skull. The experience of the uncanny undermines not only geometral space but also the concomitant Enlightenment fantasy of the fully self-determined, highly ratiocinated subject, much like the ambassadors in Holbein’s painting beneath which, on the very rug (ground) that they stand, is death’s head—a creeping corpse. However, to understand how desire can be ‘sited’ and moved throughout these multiple moments of the uncanny, we need to deepen our understanding of what structures are constituting or ordering the subject’s experience of the emerging uncanny, moving it away from the ocular. If we take seriously that we are not essential, unchanging subjects then we must ask the question of how the uncanny emerges before us despite its being unseen. The experience of the uncanny, which can emerge at any moment, *lays bare the fragility of the desiring subject* whose internalized alienation allows us to show up with our cracks on, our fragility transparent.

I suggest that the uncanny is the site where Freud can contest the limits of his psychoanalysis, for the very possibility that discontinuity can emerge or come into appearance in the uncanny goes beyond any ocularcentric lexicon. It is perhaps not until Lacan outlines, in his Seminar XI, the structural contours of the gaze as the uncovering of a circuitous movement of anamorphosis (as illustrated in Holbein’s *The Ambassadors*), that we grasp the possibilities for the uncanny to expose the structure of a vital slippage and finally of psychoanalysis itself. What appears in the uncanny is not at all available to mundane vision; and the disclosure of the uncanny becomes, instead, a showing of what Lacan calls “a dialectic of desire” (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 89). The uncanny lays bare the fissures of fragmentation within our subjectivity. It uncovers the play of the strange and foreign, or the merging of the borders of reality and fantasy. It even uncovers our constant desire, the very path of desire, to go into the source of fragmentation in order to destabilize the borders and boundaries that we erect to ensure our attempts at stability; interruption can emerge at any time and so too can total discontinuity – death.

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Notes

1 Square brackets added by translator.

2 I use the term 'ocularcentrism,' from Martin Jay in his work *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.)

3 This is not to say that hearing (indicated by the sound of the rustling leaves) suggests the gaze whilst vision does not. The point is not to privilege one sense above another. For our understanding of the Lacanian gaze, the rustling of the leaves which initiates the hunter's changed sensibility is an instantaneous shift in apprehension and awareness.

4 Freud's early Gymnasium translation of Sophocles' ancient tragedy, *Oedipus Rex*, initiated a complex enduring and recurring relation, which provided conceptual, discursive and figurative framing for key aspects in his new science of psychoanalysis. The play's use of vision works on many levels: visceral self-blinding, blind sages, and vision as a metaphor for knowledge are among the most obvious. *Oedipus Rex* was ensconced as an imaginative touchstone for Freud which both nourished his ego and organized his approach to knowledge. While at the University of Vienna—which had a campus spotted with statues of great professors long past—Freud would imagine himself a *statue* among them, his epithetic description not only a quote from the Sophoclean play, but a quote which described Freud *as Oedipus himself*: "He divined the famous riddle and was a most mighty man." cf. Kathleen Krull, *Sigmund Freud in Giants of Science* (New York: Viking Press, 2006).

5 For a detailed analysis of this see Martin Jay's commentary on Freud's "Civilization and its Discontents," in *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) 333.

6 See Sigmund Freud, "Psychogenic Disturbance of Vision" in *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, Leonardo Da Vinci and Other Works* in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XI, edited by James Strachey (1910) (London: Vintage Press, 2001). Significant as the first published text explicating 'ego-instincts' (instincts of self-preservation which emphasize repression), this 1910 article continued Freud's attempt to articulate a theory of the instincts consistent with his ontological assumptions regarding the relation between the inorganic and organic.

7 It is interesting to note that this blurring of the borders echoes Kristeva's explication of the structure of abjection, "How can I be without border?...I behold the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders". However useful this comparison between the uncanny and abjection is (Kristeva often invokes the uncanny in her descriptions of abjection), she nonetheless warns us that abjection is more violent than the uncanny because abjection lacks the turning back, it lacks the double movement of the familiar-strange/strange-familiar. In abjection there cannot be a double movement because the boundaries are blurred *absolutely*. See Julia Kristeva. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) 1-5.